

26 November 2007

Ms Margaret Goldie  
Corporate Director for Children and Young People  
West Berkshire Council  
Avonbank House  
West Street  
Newbury  
West Berkshire RG14 1BZ

Dear Ms Goldie

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority, some aspects of which was conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review (JAR). The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the JAR and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the JAR team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the JAR were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the JAR report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

### **Overall effectiveness of children's services**

**Grade 3**

West Berkshire Council consistently delivers services above minimum requirements for children and young people. Outcomes in each of the five main areas are good overall. Children's services are making a number of significant contributions to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people in the area. The Directorate of Children's Services was set up early. It has evolved very effectively. The integration of services is very well established at senior level. Collaboration with external partners is good.

The clearly articulated CYPP, and the reviews of progress on it, demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement. Areas of need have been identified and addressed precisely and the few emerging gaps are being tackled. There are signs of progress in many outcomes over the last year and most of the items identified for improvement in the 2006 APA have been dealt with successfully. In particular, much

good work has taken place to strengthen provision and outcomes for some vulnerable groups, particularly looked after children and young people.

## **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The health of most children in West Berkshire is good. The council works in close partnership with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to improve the outcomes for children and young people particularly through the promotion of healthy lifestyles and good health for children and young people. In a recent survey carried out by the council as part of its review of the CYPP, most children and young people reported feeling very healthy or quite healthy and only 7% felt they were not very healthy. Good arrangements for partnership working between the council and the newly formed PCT are in place. There has been some good progress on joint commissioning arrangements for some vulnerable groups but the responses to the needs of groups such as travellers are still being developed.

At birth, all children receive a comprehensive health assessment and new parents are provided with information and advice on health promotion. There is a specialist health visitor for teenage parents working to good effect. Immunisation rates are high relative to other areas. Children's centres and schools contribute well to promoting the health of children and young people. Good baseline information is available locally about the prevalence of childhood obesity. Several different approaches are being adopted to combat obesity including the promotion of sports and exercise in and out of school. All schools are using the 'Food in Schools' toolkit supported by School Nutrition Action Groups and a dedicated dietician. They have been briefed or trained on the revised Healthy Schools Award and, despite a slower than anticipated implementation rate, the council expects to meet the national target of 55% required by December 2007. This constitutes a challenge, however, as the council has been well behind similar councils in implementing the programme.

There has been a very good reduction in teenage pregnancy rates and the number of diagnoses of chlamydia in young people has continued to reduce. Advice on sexual health, contraception and smoking cessation, as well as advice and treatment for substance abuse are available in a range of settings. A successful smoking cessation programme has been provided through a joint initiative between the local authority and the PCT as part of the Local Area Agreement. A high proportion of young people who need it are accessing drugs treatment and there is a dedicated substance abuse service for young people in place.

The percentage of health assessments for looked after children and young people completed within statutory timescales remains high at 81% but it is still slightly below the national figure and that for similar authorities. The council is ambitious to increase this figure and it is piloting a fitness test approach with the local leisure centre to this end. A dedicated group has been established to consider the health issues for the Traveller Community, and the council and the PCT are taking this forward.

Working with the PCT through section 31 joint funding arrangements, the council has greatly improved Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) over the last year from a low base. The number of staff working in CAMHS has increased though the service remains stretched. All the CAMHS national proxy targets were met by the local service by December 2006. Waiting times are down from 20 weeks to 10 weeks and a feedback survey for users of the service has been positive. CAMHS has a parenting support team which provides an effective service to resolve family issues. There is a dedicated care pathway for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access CAMHS. Social and emotional aspects of learning programmes are being implemented in all schools across the area.

Within early years settings, there is good provision in relation to health standards for children and a wide range of integrated provision for children and parents within the developing children's centres. In recent early years inspections, the majority of settings were judged to be providing good outcomes in terms of health, and a higher than average percentage of settings were outstanding.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Prioritise the implementation of the National Healthy Schools Programme to ensure national targets are delivered on time.

## **Staying safe**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. There is a positive culture of safeguarding within the council. Strong inter-agency partnership makes a significant contribution to this. The operation of child protection processes is good and has improved during last year.

Advice and information is provided to parents and carers about safety in children's centres and schools. The majority of early years settings provide good outcomes for safeguarding children; a higher than average proportion of settings is outstanding. An anti-bullying plan has been implemented but its effectiveness is not yet clear. There are good protocols in place for children missing from education which are regularly reviewed to ensure they identify children moving in and out of the county. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has put in place a self-review tool for

headteachers and governors for schools to report on their functions to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Effective child protection policies and procedures, which have been developed with other local areas, are in place. The LSCB has recently appointed an independent chair. It effectively oversees inter-agency safeguarding but has identified some additional work to ensure that a clear training needs analysis exists, and that multi-agency performance is regularly reviewed. Good multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are in place and the MAPPA coordinator is a member of the LSCB. Parents' views about the child protection processes have been surveyed and plans for improvement are being put in place as a result. Common Assessment Framework training has been provided to over 500 professionals and more integrated working is evident in the increasing numbers of common assessments completed.

The number of looked after children and young people is low and the use of family group conferences and the work of the family resources team have supported this. The council and its partners provide a range of preventative services through its 'Strengthening Families' approach. Effective use is made of family group and restorative conferences to resolve family conflicts and to reduce the need for services particularly to prevent children from being harmed or becoming looked after. There has been a 30% increase in the uptake of this service in the last year and the engagement of both professionals and family members, including children, is high. Good outcomes for children result from this work. Good systems are in place across health, education and social care for identifying, reporting and assessing private fostering placements. Although notifications are increasing and the timeliness of response from children's services is improving the council recognises that further work is needed.

The rate of referrals for children in need has increased during the year and is now on a par with that in similar authorities but remains below the national average. The rate of re-referrals to the service was high in 2006/07 though this was in part due to problems with new electronic recording systems; more recent data show considerable improvement. The number of initial assessments completed is lower than in the previous year and well below the local target set, but the number of core assessments completed has increased. The timeliness of both initial assessments and core assessments has reduced in that period though more recent data show improvements in the timeliness of core assessments. Some staffing shortfalls during the year – which have since been resolved in the short term through recruitment from overseas – have contributed to this lower performance. The number of initial child protection conferences held and the number of children on the child protection register, relative to the child population of the area, have risen significantly this year and are now similar to comparator authorities. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker. The rate of re-registrations to the child protection register is very good. All child protection cases were reviewed on time which is very good performance. Thresholds for access to social care services

have recently been reviewed in consultation with all local partners, including schools, to ensure there is a good understanding of when referrals should be made.

The number of looked after children and young people has remained stable over the last year. The inter-agency Life Chances Team effectively oversees the provision of services for looked after children through good monitoring arrangements and a comprehensive database which is regularly reviewed. All looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker and a high percentage have been adopted during the year. The percentage of children placed in residential care has continued to reduce and the percentage of children placed with families and friends has increased though it is still below the national average. Placement stability for looked after children, both short-term and long-term, is very good and significantly better than nationally. The Fostering Inspection in February 2007 was very positive about the service and its capacity to safeguard children; some areas of excellent performance were identified. Good placement choice with high availability of well-trained and supported local foster carers is available.

A programme called 'Seeing Red' has been implemented to promote independent living skills and safeguarding for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This includes work on 'stranger danger' and road safety. A good quality short break service for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is provided at the Castle Gate Centre. In addition, a wide range of family placements and support are provided at home to support children and carers through short breaks.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Improve the timeliness of completion of initial assessments and maintain the improved timeliness of core assessments.
- Ensure that a workforce strategy for the recruitment and retention of social workers is developed.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Since the JAR took place, unvalidated 2007 performance data have become available. Data show an upward trend in GCSE examination results that has been sustained since 2004. Standards continue to be above average in secondary schools. They are broadly average in primary schools with good signs of recent improvement. Children and young people make good progress over their time at school. Results in the Tellus2 survey, based on a relatively small sample of children and young people in the area, showed that on the whole they enjoy school and try to do their best. These results are supported by school inspection outcomes. Attendance in primary schools is outstanding and in secondary schools it is good, and this also confirms positive attitudes to education. Since the 2006 APA, the number of exclusions has decreased overall.

Parents and carers receive good support in helping their children enjoy and achieve. For example, in family learning, parents and carers learn about the value of play and are more able and confident to support their children's development and deal with difficult behaviour. The majority of child care settings provide well to enable children to enjoy and achieve; a few are outstanding. The quality of nursery education is mostly good. The Foundation Stage in primary schools is generally good although the proportion of children meeting early learning goals in the two main areas of learning was considerably lower than the national average in 2006; provisional figures for 2007 show an improvement.

In Key Stage 1, standards dipped slightly from 2005 to 2006 but unvalidated results in 2007 show some improvement, particularly in those schools involved in the 'Intensifying Support Programme'. The trend of improvement in children and young people's writing up to 2006 at this stage has been well below that occurring nationally and in similar local authorities; much well-focused work has been undertaken in the last year to raise standards in reading and writing at Key Stage 1 but the impact of this has yet to be fully realised. Test results in Key Stage 2 are slightly above average but, up to 2006, they too have not been improving overall as well as nationally. The unvalidated results for 2007, however, show a marked improvement and the local authority has been recognised by the Department for Children, Schools and Families as one of the most improved nationally for Key Stage 2. Moreover, the proportion of lower attaining children and young people (attaining below Level 3) have been significantly reduced. Overall, the rate of progress in Key Stage 2 is average.

Performance of secondary schools is generally stronger than in the primary phase and all schools achieve above floor targets. In particular, the capped GCSE average point score in 2006 was well above the national average. Unvalidated Key Stage 3 results for 2007 are broadly similar to those in 2006. In Key Stage 4, provisional results in 2007 show improvement, particularly in the percentage of children and young people gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C including English and mathematics; at 57.4%, this is considerably higher than the national figure of 45.3% in 2006. The local authority is implementing strategies to improve further attainment of boys and of Black and minority ethnic pupils.

In 2007 most looked after young people aged 16 gained at least one GCSE pass and about two thirds of them achieved five: this is an improvement on the previous year. The council is ambitious to improve further the educational attainment of looked after children and the Life Chances Team is focused on providing additional support through its teachers: targets are set termly with every school for looked after children. Some notable successes include the three looked after young people now at university and several on the Duke of Edinburgh programme supported by a dedicated youth worker.

School inspections show that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good or better progress in most schools; the proportion of schools in which this is true is slightly better than in similar local authorities. Over the

last year, there have been improvements in the performance of these children and young people at Key Stage 2, GCSE, and in the number achieving Level 2 qualifications by the age of 17. The local authority provides effective support to enable children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access leisure and community based activities. Special and mainstream schools provide them with a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits, and these have increased their self-confidence and social skills.

The proportion of schools that provide a good or better overall quality of education is higher than in similar local authorities and nationally. A few are in Ofsted categories of concern and these schools are provided with good support to improve. The authority has strengthened its procedures to identify and challenge relatively underperforming schools. School improvement services are targeting their efforts well to those schools most at risk of underachieving.

In 2006, permanent exclusions in secondary schools were above the national average. Working in partnership with headteachers, the local authority has successfully reduced permanent exclusions. Fixed-term exclusions have similarly been reduced except in primary schools. The positive and downward trend has not yet reduced exclusions to below the local authority figures of a few years ago which were broadly average. The proportion of excluded children and young people provided with alternative tuition of 20 hours or more has risen in recent years and is similar to the national average. Exclusions from special schools are very low. Pupil referral units are good and work well to reintegrate children or to support part-time attendance at school. This year, a study support grant was used to provide additional help to a number of young people included looked after children and those from other vulnerable groups.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Raise further educational outcomes in the Foundation Stage, in Key Stage 1, particularly in writing, and overall in Key Stage 2.
- Reduce further the overall rates of exclusions from schools.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Children and young people's involvement in making decisions about service delivery is well promoted by the council. The percentage of young people aged 13–19 reached by publicly funded youth services is considerably higher than nationally and in similar local authorities, even though the ratio of full-time youth workers to young people is lower than average. The overall personal development and well-being of children and young people, as judged in school inspections is broadly similar to that found nationally and in similar local authorities. The proportion of schools in which children and young people make a good or better

contribution to the community is higher. Based on the Tellus2 survey the extent to which children and young people feel that they contribute to their school or community is very similar to that found nationally.

More than 500 young people in secondary schools were consulted about the role of the Connexions service. The 'Big Buzz Challenge', a locally developed toolkit, has enabled young people to engage in town and parish planning and grants have been given to support young people's projects. Young people acted as trained assessors for the Youth Opportunity Fund. Young people are members of the council's Disability Scheme Scrutiny Panel and monitor progress on the implementation of the Disability Equality Scheme.

The percentage of looked after children and young people participating in their reviews has improved during the year from 82% in 2005/06 to 89% this year, which is slightly better than the national average. More recent unvalidated data show that 100% of reviews have been on time since April 2007. Looked after children's complaints processes have been changed to reflect the new guidance and staff trained and supported to see complaints as positive feedback to their work. A new Children's Complaints Leaflet has been developed.

The local authority has re-shaped and expanded its support for children and young people from minority ethnic groups and for new arrivals from Eastern Europe with a view to increasing their participation in learning and contribution to the community. It was successful in a bid for financing this work. A new system of checking the effectiveness of this work has been implemented.

The council has provided support for young carers but recently the continuity of this service has been interrupted by the unexpected withdrawal of the external provider. There are plans in place, involving parents and children, to restart this work but there is no provision at present. Most of the children who were receiving the support have siblings with a disability. Few have disabled parents showing that the service was not reaching many children in need of this provision.

Through the Early Intervention team, 20 mentors have been recruited and trained by the youth offending team (YOT) to link young people at risk of offending to positive activities in the community. The Greenham Community Project consists of different agencies working with children and young people to provide a coordinated response to anti-social behaviour and low level disaffection in the parish. The police have reported a reduction in reported incidents of anti-social behaviour in the area.

The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system has been maintained at a lower level than in similar authorities and is broadly in line with national figures. The recent YOT inspection was positive and the YOT is regarded as effective. The percentage of looked after children and young people offending in 2006/07 has reduced to 2.8% which is an improvement on last year when the percentage was 3.3%. However, this is still slightly higher than nationally and in similar authorities.



## Area(s) for development

- Ensure that the service for young carers is re-established and that its reach is extended.

## Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. The percentage of young people gaining Level 2 qualifications by the age of 19 is above the national average although it was still only just over 75% in 2006; the unvalidated figure for 2007 is slightly lower. The percentage gaining Level 3 qualifications in 2006 is 54% which is higher than the national average of 44% although the average point scores per entry and per students are broadly average. The NVQ success rate for all work-based learners living in the area and aged under 19 at the start of their programme is higher than the national average.

The overall effectiveness of 16–19 education in secondary and special schools, based on recent inspections, is good or better in more of them than found on average nationally. The local authority is aware, however, that the overall value-added in sixth forms is variable, ranging from outstanding to inadequate; the school improvement service is acting effectively to tackle shortcomings. The extent to which children and young people in schools develop workplace and other skills for their future well-being is broadly average. The local authority has, with its partners, made some good strides in developing the curriculum for young people aged 16–19; an on-line Berkshire wide prospectus has been produced as part of a good revised 14–19 strategy to improve participation and achievement. With the advent of diplomas, schools are being encouraged to work in greater partnership in spite of the difficulties of some great distances between schools. Good collaboration exists with neighbouring local authorities, for example Reading, aiming to maximise efficiency of development and provision. The range of vocational provision has been increased since last year. Nevertheless, there is still a need to develop further the curriculum post-16 to take account of local skill needs.

The percentage of 16–19 year olds not in education, employment or training, based on 2006 data, is lower than the national average but not a low as that in similar local authorities. The local authority states that all Year 11 leavers from the Castle and Brookfields Special Schools are in education, employment or training in September 2007. The proportion of young people leaving Year 11 who continue in learning is average at 87%. The proportion of young people with additional needs who were not in education, employment or training on leaving school has reduced from 14.7% in 2005 to 9.1% in 2006.

Although 90% of care leavers were reported to be in suitable accommodation in 2005/06, findings from the JAR are that not all young people are appropriately housed. A high percentage but not all care leavers have a pathway plan in place.

There has been a steady growth in child care providers and places, whilst there has been a decrease in sessional care providers; this is consistent with the national picture. The overall increase in child care provision, and of good quality, is making a positive contribution to economic well-being in the area.

The Tellus2 survey shows that most young people feel positive about the area as a place to live in. They are generally clear about what they want to do when they leave school although roughly four in ten would like better information and advice about planning their future, which is the same as found nationally. In the Berkshire Connexions Partnership, the average number of young people per adviser has been below average.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Increase further the breadth of vocational qualifications offered.
- Improve achievement in Level 2 qualifications at age 19.
- Identify needs for accommodation for care leavers and develop additional provision to ensure all care leavers are appropriately housed.

## **Capacity to improve, including the management of Services for children and young people**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The council has stated its high ambitions clearly, and has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Its management of these services is strong and there is effective senior leadership and good corporate support to bring about improvement. The directorate is seeking to implement full operational integration this year through the introduction of multi-disciplinary locality children's services teams. A particular strength is in the partnerships the council has with other agencies to ensure coherence in its work to serve the community. The 2006 CYPP is comprehensive and detailed in most respects; further work is being undertaken to address the needs of some specific groups, for example travellers. The review of the CYPP shows that good progress is being made on most fronts. The quality of self-evaluation and assessment is also a strength as is performance management.

The Corporate Parenting Board for looked after children and vulnerable young people provides good leadership and monitoring of performance. Members of the Board are involved in scrutinising the service. A multi-agency resource panel meets regularly to agree jointly funded care packages based on shared assessments for children and young people with the most complex needs. There is a pooled budget agreement with the PCT for CAMHS and for the provision of services for disabled children at Castle Gate. There are jointly funded senior posts including the Director of Public Health.

The provision of schools places is managed well. No secondary schools have 25% or more surplus places. In primary schools, the proportion that has surplus places is similar to the national average and in similar local authorities.

School improvement services have demonstrated their good capacity to maintain and raise standards and improve the overall quality of provision, taking strident action where required, for example to close and fresh start a school, or work with governors to take action as necessary.

There have been some staffing issues within social care teams during the year with higher than usual vacancies in some teams. This was resolved partly through the recruitment of eight social workers from overseas. However, the staff are on two-year time-limited contracts and a workforce strategy is required to ensure continuity of staffing.

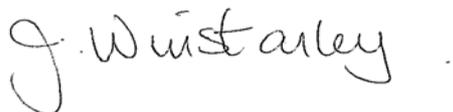
Income and expenditure are broadly the same as in similar authorities and lower than nationally on average. Costs of services for looked after children and young people have increased this year to above the national average though they are only just higher than in similar authorities. Expenditure on social care staff training is lower than for statistical neighbours and nationally. The number of staff working specifically for children's services reduced in 2006/07 and is below the national average.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Ensure that the strategy for recruitment and retention of staff, including training, is clearly articulated for social care.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection